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THE MUSIC LOVER

HENRY VAN DYKE

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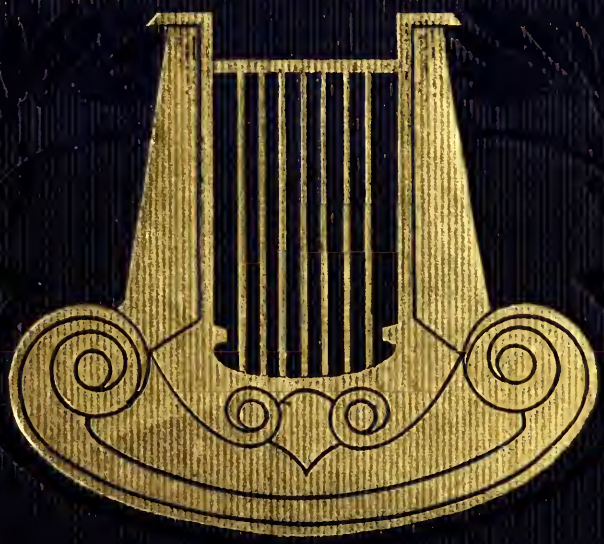

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THE MUSIC LOVER

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From a painting by Sigismond de Ivanowski

THE MUSIC-LOVER

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THE MUSIC LOVER

BY

HENRY VAN DYKE

With Frontispiece by
SIGISMOND DE IVANOWSKI

NEW YORK
MOFFAT, YARD & COMPANY
1916

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NEW YORK

Published September, 1907
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THE MUSIC LOVER

THE Lover of Music had come to his favorite seat. It was in the front row of the balcony, just where the curve reaches its outermost point, and, like a rounded headland, meets the unbroken flow of the long-rolling, invisible waves of rhythmical sound.

The value of that chosen place did not seem to be known to the world, else there would have been a higher price demanded for the privilege of occupying it. People were willing to

pay far more to get into the boxes, or even to have a chair reserved on the crowded level of the parquet.

But the Lover of Music cared little for fashion, and had long ago ceased to reckon the worth of things by the prices asked for them in the market. He knew that his coign of vantage, by some secret confluence of architectural lines, gave him the very best of the delight of hearing that the vast hall contained. It was for that delight that he was thirsting, and he surrendered himself to it confidently and entirely.

THE MUSIC LOVER

He had arrived at an oasis in the day. Since morning he had been toiling through the Sahara of the city's noise: arid, senseless, inhospitable noise: roaring of wheels, clanging of bells, shrieking of whistles, clatter of machinery, squawking of horns, raucous and strident voices: confused, bewildering, exhausting noise, a desolate and unfriendly desert for the ear.

Now all that waste, howling wilderness was shut out by the massive walls of the concert-hall, and he found himself in a haven of refuge.

But silence alone would not have healed and restored his spirit. It needed something more than the absence of harsh and brutal and meaningless noise to satisfy him; it needed the presence of melody and harmony: tones measured, ordered and restrained; varied and blended not by chance, but by feeling and reason; sound expressive of the secret life and the rhythmical emotion of the human heart. And this he found flowing all around him, entering deeply into him, filling all the parched and empty channels of his being, as he listened to

Beethoven's great Symphony in C Minor.

There was nothing between him and the orchestra. He looked over the railing of the gallery, which shaded his eyes from the lights above the boxes, straight across the gulf in which the mass of the audience, diminutive and indistinguishable, seemed to be submerged, to the brilliant island of the stage.

The figure of the conductor, dressed in black, stood in the center; silent,

impassive, firm, eloquent in his tranquil poise. With slight motions, easy and graceful as if they came without thought and required no effort, his right hand, with the little baton, gave the time and rhythm, commanding swift obedience; while his left hand lightly beckoned here and there with magical persuasion, drawing forth louder or softer notes, stirring the groups of instruments to passionate expression, or hushing them to delicate and ethereal strains.

There was no labour, no dramatic display in that leadership; nothing to

distract the attention, or to break the spell of the music. All the toil of art, the consideration of effects, the sharp and vehement assertion of authority, lay behind him in the rehearsals.

Now the finished work, the noble interpretation of the composer's musical idea, flowed forth at the leader's touch, as if each motive and phrase, each period and melody, were waiting somewhere in the air to reveal itself at his slight signal. And through all the movement of the *Allegro con brio,* with its momentous struggle between

Fate and the human soul, the orchestra answered to the master's will as if it were a single instrument.

And so, for a time, it seemed to the Lover of Music as he looked down upon it from his lofty place. With what precision the bows of the violins moved up and down together; how accurately the wood-winds came in with their gentler notes; how regularly the brazen keys of the trumpets rose and fell, and the long, shining tubes of the trombone slid out and in. Such varied motions, yet all so limited, so orderly,

so certain and obedient, looked like the sure interplay of the parts of a wonderful machine.

He watched them as if in a dream, fascinated by their regularity, their simplicity in detail, their complexity in the mass—watched them with his eyes, while his heart was carried along with the flood of music. More and more the impression of a marvelous unity, a mechanical certainty of action, grew upon that half of his mind which was occupied with sight, and gave him a singular satisfaction and comfort.

It was good to be free, for a little while at least, from the everlasting personal equation, the perplexing interest in human individuals, the mysterious and disturbing sympathies awakened by contact with other lives, and to give one's self to the pure enjoyment of an impersonal work of art, rendered by the greatest of instruments.

But presently the *Allegro* came to an end, and with the pause there came that brief stir in the orchestra, that momentary relaxation of nerves and muscles, that moving and turning of

many heads in different directions, that swift interchange of looks and smiles and whispered words between the players, which seemed like the temporary dissolving of the spell that made them one. And with this general but separated and uncertain movement a vague thought, an unformulated question, passed into the mind of the Lover of Music.

How would the leader reassemble the parts of his instrument, in a few seconds, and make them one again, and resume his control over it? How

would he make the pipes and strings and tubes and drums answer to his touch, though he laid no hand upon them? There must be some strange, invisible keyboard, some secret system of communication between him and those various contrivances of wood and wire and sheep-skin and horse-hair and metal (so curiously and grotesquely fashioned, when one came to consider them), out of which he was to bring melody and harmony. How should one conceive of this mysterious key-board and its hidden connections?

How should one comprehend and imagine it? Was it not, after all, the most wonderful thing about the great instrument on which the symphony was played?

While the Lover of Music, leaning back in his seat, was idly turning over this thought, the *Andante* began, and all definite questioning and reasoning were absorbed in the calm, satisfying melody which flowed from the violas and 'cellos.

But now a singular change came

over the half-conscious impression which his eyes received as they rested on the orchestra. It was no longer a huge and strangely fashioned instrument, intricate in construction, perfect in adjustment, that he was watching.

It was a company of human beings, trained and disciplined to common action, understanding one another through the sharing of a certain technical knowledge, and bound together by a unity of will which was expressed in their central obedience to the leader. The arms, the hands, the lips of these hun-

dred persons were weaving together the many-coloured garment of music, because their minds knew the pattern, and their wills worked together in the design.

Here was the wonderful hidden system of communication, more magical than any mechanism, just because it was less perfect, just because it left room, along each separate channel, for the coming in of those slight, incalculable elements of personal emotion which lend the touch of life to rhythm and tone.

The instruments were but the tools. The composer was the master-designer. The leader and his orchestra were the weavers of the rich robe of sound, in which alone the hidden Spirit of Music, daughter of Psyche and Amor, becomes perceptible to mortal sense. The smooth and harmonious action of the players seemed to lend a new charm, delicate and indefinable, to the development of the clear and heart-strengthening theme with its subtle variations and its powerful, emphatic close, like the fullness of meaning in the last line of a noble sonnet.

In the pause that followed, the Lover of Music let himself drift quietly with the thoughts of peace and concord awakened by this loveliest of andantes. The beginning of the *Scherzo* found him, somehow or other, in a new relation to the visible image of the orchestra. The weird, almost supernatural music, murmured at first by the 'cellos and double-basses, then proclaimed by the horns as if by the trumpet of Fate itself; the repetition of the same struggle of emotions which had marked the first movement, but now more tense, more passionate, more

human, the strange, fantastic mingling of comedy and tragedy in the *Trio* and the *Fugue* with its abrupt questions and answers; all this seemed to him like a moving picture of the inner life of man.

And while he followed it, the other half of his mind was watching the players, no longer as a group, a unit of disciplined action, but as individuals, persons for each of whom life had a distinct colour, and tone, and meaning.

His eyes rested unconsciously on the pale, dreamy face of the second violin-

ist; the black, rugged brows of the trumpeter: the long, gentle countenance of the flute-player with its flexible lips and blond beard.

The grizzled head of the 'cellist bent over his instrument with an air of quiet devotion; the burly form of the player of the double-bassoon, behind his rare and awkward instrument, waiting for his time to come in, had the look of a man who could not be surprised or troubled by anything; one of the bass-violinists had the rough-hewn figure and the

divinely chiseled, sorrow-lighted face of Lincoln, the others were children of the everyday; the clarionettist, with his dark beard and high temples, might have sat for Rembrandt's picture of "The Philosopher"; and the rotund kettle-drummer, with his smooth head and sparkling eyes, restlessly turning his little keys and bending down to listen to the tuning of his grotesque music-pots, seemed impatient for the part in the score when he was to build the magical bridge, on which the symphony passes, without a break, from the third to the last movement.

"All these persons," said the inner voice of the Lover of Music (he listening all the while to the entangling and unfolding, dismissing and recalling of the various motives)—"all these persons have their own lives and characters. They have known joys and sorrows, failures and successes. They have hoped and feared. All that Beethoven poured into this music from his experience of poverty, of conflict with physical weakness and the cruel limitations of Fate, of baffled desire, of loneliness, of strong resolution, of immortal courage and faith, these players

in their measure and degree have known.

"Even now they may be in love, in hatred, in friendship, in jealousy, in gloom, in resignation, in courage, or in happiness. What strange paths lie behind them; what laughter and what tears have they shared; what secret ties unite them, one with another, and what hidden barriers rise between those who do not understand and those who do not care! There are many stories running along underneath this music, some of them just begun, some long

since ended, some never to find a true completion: little stories of many lands, humorous and pathetic, droll and capricious legends, merry jests, vivid romances, serious tales of patience and devotion.

"And out of these stories, because they are human, has come the humanity of the players: the thing which makes it possible for them to feel this music, and to play it, not as a machine would play, grinding it out with dead monotony, but with all the colour and passion of life itself.

"Why should we not know something of this hidden background of the orchestra? Why should not somebody tell one of the stories that is waiting here? Not you, but some one familiar with this region, who has trodden its paths and shared in its labours; not a mere lover of music, but a musician."

Here the inner voice which had been running along through the *Scherzo* and the *Trio* and the *Recapitulation,* died away quietly with the *pianissimo* passage in which the

double-basses and the drum carry one through the very heart of mystery; and the Lover of Music found himself intensely waiting for the great *Finale*. Now it comes, long-expected, surprising, victorious, sweeping all the instruments into its mighty current, pausing for a moment to take up the most delicate and mysterious melody of the *Scherzo* (changed as if by magic into something new and strange), and then moving on again, with hurrying, swelling tide, until it breaks in the swift-rolling, thunderous billows of immeasurable jubilation.

THE MUSIC LOVER

The Lover of Music drew a long breath. He sat motionless in his seat. The storm of applause did not disturb him. He did not notice that the audience had risen. He was looking at the orchestra, already beginning to melt away; but he did not really see them.

Presently a cane was stretched out from the second row behind him, and touched him on the shoulder. He turned around and saw the face of his friend the Dreamer, the Brushwood Boy, with his bright eyes and disheveled hair. And beside him was

the radiant presence of the Girl Who Understood.

"*Lieber Meister,*" said the Boy, "you are coming now with us. There is a bite and a sup, and a pipe and an open fire, waiting for you in our room. *Bitte komm!*"

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